

Lingvistika

THE LANGUAGE OF MYSTICS – THE MYSTICS OF LANGUAGE. A READING OF KABIR'S POEM

Przemysław Piekarski

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

The paper tries to solve one of many Kabir's mysteries – his ontological outlook. Being suspended between Hinduism and Islam, the great mystic gives in his poetry hints which can be read twice-fold. Linguistic analysis of one of his poems sets to disclose monistic and dualistic attitudes to the Absolute.

Kabir has been if not the world's then definitely India's greatest mystic. What we know about him is mostly legends and tradition kept up by his followers – Kabir Panthis. His life span varies in different sources from seventy to three hundred years¹. Collections of his songs vary in volume and reliability. Those included in Sikhs' Adi Granth seem to be rather authentic, however a discussion arises around Bijaks – collections of his songs. Some authors neglect the authenticity of some portions, some – the whole collection². On the one hand, Kabir himself was illiterate or as Indian tradition wants to see him – alliterate, on the other hand his followers have been taken by anti- plagiarism. We can doubt about many pieces ascribed to the master yet they have the poet's signature in the last *doha* (couplet).

If we take his legendary biography as the starting point for controversies we should start with his birth. Presumably a legal son of a bramin widow, like Moses, was put into a basket and floated down the stream of the Ganges in Varanasi. His rescuers and new parents, an elderly couple of Muslim weavers granted him proper Muslim education (why then illiteracy?). His mystical experience was for some time guided by Sufi pir Pitambar. Then Kabir became a disciple of the Hindu guru Ramananda.

¹ William L. Smith, "Imagining the life of Kabir", *Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing*, vol. 1, nr 1, New Delhi, 2000, 171–176.

² Dharmvir, "Complete eclipse of the sun; Dwidedi's Kabir", *Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing*, vol. 1, nr 1, New Delhi, 2000, 188–232.

His attitude to both religions is expressed clearly in many of his dohas. Hated by Muslim rulers, suspected by Hindu gurus even at his death Kabir was a mystery. As one of the legends tells us the disciples quarreled about the way Master's body should be treated. After long arguments someone suggested asking Master Himself. Under the shroud a bunch of flowers was found. A part of them was buried and the other burnt thus satisfying both parties.

Till the present time arguments continue and solutions are not easy. One of the main problems is mystical ontology. The Hindus, according to Advaita Vedanta, are monists. Individual soul – atman and the Universal Being – Absolute – brahman are one. During the period of bhakti (mysticism) some other standpoints were elaborated (*bheda – abheda* – separated yet inseparable; *visishtadvaita* – special non dualism. etc.)³. On the other hand Muslims have always been dualists, in spite of Sufi monistic tendencies⁴.

Bearing in mind the problems let us closer examine one of Kabir's poems.

*ham sab māmhi sakal ham māmhīm/
ham the aur dūsra nāhīm//
tīn lok mem hamārā pasārā/
āgāgaman sab khel hamārā//
khaṛ darsan kahiyat bhekhā/
hamhīm atīt rūp nahīm rekhā//
hamhīm āp kabīr kahāvā/
hamhīm apnām āp lakhāvā//⁵*

In a way similar to the *post mortem* “flower testimony” we can read out the ontological level in two juxtaposed ways. The mystics of grammar can be helpful. In Hindi *ham* is a word denoting the first person, plural pronoun – corresponding to English ‘we’. The language of Kabir's poetry is what he called himself *purvi* – eastern, which means a variety of Avadhi – one of Hindi dialects, known not only by the great poetry of Tulsi Das but of Indian Sufis who, like Malkk Muhammad Jayasi have made use of it. The problem we face very often in Urdu, which is basically kindred to Hindi, is the lack of some pronoun forms. There no separate plural forms are in case of third person pronouns hence we have *yah/ye* and *vah/ve* for both the numbers. A similar problem occurs with the first person pronoun – *ham* which can stand for both singular and plural. In spoken language it is very often differentiated by *log* ‘people’ being here a semantic modifier of plurality. Such a problem occurs not only in Urdu. It does exist also in peripheral dialects of Hindi.

What can it possibly have to do with the reading of the poem? We can read the poem twice fold – either the Hindu way, were *ham* means ‘we’ – and in this way support the Muslim, dual ontological standpoint, or the Muslim/ Urdu way, taking *ham* as ‘I’ and supporting the Hindu

³ Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. IV, Delhi, 1975.

⁴ Al Hallaj – an al haq – “I am Him” – ref. Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Cultures in the Indian Environment*, Oxford, 1964.

⁵ *Kabir granthāvalī*, ed. By Bhagavatsvarup Mishr, Agara, 1983, 467–468.

Advaita – monistic stand point. If we take *ham* as 'we' and *ham* of 'I' meaning, the possible readings go as follows:

We in everything, everything in us	I am in everything, everything in me
We were and no other	I was and not another
We have transcended three worlds	I have transcended three worlds
Life (coming and going) is our play	Life is my play
Told by seven systems	Told by seven systems
We have no limits	I have no limits
We have called ourselves Kabir	I have called myself Kabir
And revealed to ourselves.	And revealed to myself.

MISTIKŲ KALBA IR KALBOS MISTIKAI. KABIRO EILĖRAŠČIO SKAITYMAS

Przemysław Piekarski

Santrauka

Straipsnyje mėginama atskleisti vieną iš daugelio Kabiro paslapčių – jo ontologinę nuostatą. Atsidūręs tarp hinduizmo ir islamo, didysis mistikas savo poezijoje pateikia užuominų, kurias galima skaityti dvejopai. Lingvistinė vieno jo eilėraščio analizė leidžia parodyti tiek monistinį, tiek dualistinį požiūrį į Absoliutą.